OK LIBR
FIC SCHOOL
F RELIGION

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

No. 69 FEBRUARY 19TH, 1941

DEAR MEMBER,

The *News-Chronicle* has been publishing for the past three weeks a series of articles and correspondence on "God and the War." That a daily newspaper should regard a national discussion of this subject as a matter of public interest and a means of improving its circulation shows that in its belief the question is exercising the minds of many people.

GOD AND THE WAR

Mr. J. B. Priestley is quite right in maintaining in his introductory article to the series that we must not isolate the religious problem created by the war. To those who had the imagination to perceive and understand the facts of the pre-war world the question of God's relation to the kind of world in which we were living was hardly less acute than it is now. He is also right in calling attention, as an anonymous soldier does also, to the fact that there is much less disposition than in the last war to think of God as controlling a department charged with the defence of British interests or to attribute to Him responsibility for the mess in which the sins and shortcomings of society have landed us. This fact is encouraging, if it means that a false way of conceiving God's action on the world is losing its hold over the minds of men.

When we think about the relation of God to the world we are always in danger of putting the question the wrong way round. We take the world for granted and ask where God comes in. Our minds, including the minds of Christians, have become so secularized that it is difficult or impossible for us to think in other terms. It is hard to realize that God is the ultimate reality and that the only question that concerns us is whether we are acting in accordance with His plan.

The Bible makes it plain that faith in God is not an inference which men have drawn from observed facts or from what they see happening around them. It is something that they have brought *to* the interpretation of events, in the light of which they have been able to understand even the worst calamities and to triumph over them. Our faith in God does not draw its strength from the fact that we were victorious in the last war. The basis of faith in God would not have been destroyed if we had lost the war, nor is it affected by the result of this war, whatever it may be.

The first step towards a right understanding is to rid our minds of the habit of thinking of God's action as having a place among the natural causes of events. This is to make God an object among other objects. It is in effect to think of Him as a glorified Henry Ford or Lord Beaverbrook, re-enforcing the cause of right in much the same way as a man of superlative energy might speed up the production of munitions. To think of God in this way is to create puzzles for which there is no solution. Whatever God may be, He is certainly not a bit of the world. He does not enter into competition with tanks and armies on the same plane. He is not a force which fills the gaps in our knowledge of natural causes; if He were that, He would become, as He has become in the minds of many people, of diminishing importance as our knowledge grows.

God is not part of the world, but its Creator. He is the ultimate ground both of physical nature and of spiritual values. When we assert His omnipotence it does not

mean that we expect Him arbitrarily to change the working of those orderly processes which are the stuff of the universe He has created. It means that no event of nature or history can keep us from having a direct and secure relation to the ultimate ground both of being and of meaning. It means that we believe with Isaiah that the material might of world-empires is as nothing and vanity in comparison with God's purpose of truth and righteousness; that with St. Paul we are persuaded that neither life nor death can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. It means that in every situation we are in communion with a personal Spirit who lays on us a task to be done in that situation and who is our Companion in fulfilling it. It means that God is Lord not only of the world of faith, in which as individuals we seek to do His will, but also, even though we cannot trace His workings, the Lord of history. It means that the course of events is determined not by chance or fate but by God's love and wisdom, and that nothing can in the end defeat His purpose of good.

If God is a reality, it is silly to be anxious whether He is pulling his weight in a battle for the right, as we conceive the right. The only concern we need have is whether we are serving with our whole heart and soul the forces of goodness and truth which are unsleepingly at work in the world. In what ways God will use our trust and obedience to influence the course of events is a mystery beyond our ken. It is enough to know that truth and right cannot fail and that those who commit their lives to God's keeping are safe from all real harm.

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

A letter from one of our members helps to get certain matters that have been dealt with in the News-Letter, into a truer perspective. The writer agrees that much needs to be done to improve religious education, but rightly urges that the success of any effort must depend on an accurate diagnosis of the actual position. Without expert examination of the facts, wrong deductions will be drawn and recourse will be had to false remedies. Sweeping assertions have been made about the ignorance of Christianity among evacuated children, but to gauge the knowledge of children in any subject is by no means as easy as it might seem. Children in strange surroundings do not readily reveal what is in their minds to strangers. They are on the defensive and are not going to run the risk of making mistakes. A question which may seem easy to an adult does not always appear easy to a child. We must be careful not to depreciate what has actually been achieved by teachers in spite of the immensity of the task.

Similarly, while the evidence of the ignorance of religion among those serving in the forces is staggering, it is a fallacy to deduce from this that the facts of religion have never been presented or learned. The psychology of remembering and forgetting needs to be borne in mind. It comes out in other matters than religion, e.g. in an astonishing ignorance of English history, which was undoubtedly learned at school. It is only the things which at the time of learning them are seen to be relevant to real purposes and interests that are truly learned and have survival value. It is the facts and skills that are related to the life to which pupils go from school that are retained and developed.

This is of crucial importance in regard to religious education. The chief weakness of the present teaching of religion is that it is divorced both from the life of the Church and from the everyday experiences of the children. Religious instruction in school can have no permanent results, and the memory of it will quickly disappear, unless it is conceived of not as learning " facts " but as learning a way of life. If the home and social environment of children does not permit the application of Christianity, there will be no retention in the memory of the historic facts on which it rests, nor any obvious advantage in attempting to learn them. Radical reform in religious education is therefore inextricably bound up with reform in our social life.

What the writer of this letter says has a double importance. It helps, in the first place, to counteract any spirit of defeatism by combatting the idea, widely taken for granted, that the Church is losing ground. It is truer to say that, faced with a gigantic task, it is making progress against heavy odds. Its success in keeping pace with the movements of

an expanding population is encouraging. When W. F. Hook was made vicar of Leeds a hundred years ago, out of a population of 150,000 there were only about 50 communicants in the parish. His incumbency witnessed the building of 21 churches and 27 schools. Similarly, the Church has followed with its ministries the rapidly growing Anglo-Saxon communities overseas. In the United States, for example, it is estimated that at the end of the American colonial period probably less than 5 per cent. of the population belonged actively to the Church; nevertheless the Church did its work so effectively in following up the westward expansion and in meeting the needs of the increasing population that by the first third of the present century 50 per cent. of the population—a percentage ten times as great as a century earlier—were enrolled as members of the Church.

Secondly, the letter brings to the fore the central problem of religious education, which is to relate Christian teaching both to the life of the Church and to the actual experience of the children. An account of experiments definitely directed to this end by a group of Congregational Churches is given in a small volume entitled *The Family Church*[1] by H. A. Hamilton. The subject of this volume gives it an importance out of all proportion to its size. The question of religious education is presented in a new setting. The experiments are based on the conviction that Christian experience can be understood and enjoyed only by sharing in the life of a Christian community, and that teaching about the Church must remain barren except in so far as it means something desirable and desired in the experience of the children. Efforts have been made in a number of congregations to enlist the resources of the whole Christian fellowship in the task of introducing to a Christian family life the eighty per cent. of children who come to Sunday School from homes which have no connection with the Church. Both the basal idea and the details of its execution are in accord with the best educational insights of our time, and the movement opens up vistas of the renewal of the Church as a living Christian community and consequently as a powerful leaven in modern society.

A statement and appeal on the subject of Christian education signed by the Archbishops of Canterbury, York and Wales has been issued as this number goes to press. The signatories state that they rejoice to know that in this matter they are in full agreement with leaders of the Free Churches and that the teaching profession increasingly shares their convictions.

THE WORLD STUDENT CHRISTIAN FEDERATION

Last Sunday was the universal Day of Prayer for students. A letter circulated in preparation for it by the general secretary of the British Student Christian Movement contained the following information about students in other countries:

" A few days ago I received a cable. I don't suppose the postal authorities made much of it, but it meant much to me. It read simply ' Christus Victor ' and it came from the new general secretary of the French S.C.M. Their beautiful conference house has been burnt out; they have been refugees on the dusty roads of France; they have known the bitterness of military defeat and yet out of all their suffering they can raise the cry ' Christus Victor.' They have proved its truth in the furnace of affliction. We have no ambassador at Vichy, but we have ambassadors for Christ amongst the students of France—and not only there, for in Finland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Holland we have recent news which tells us that work goes on.

" In some countries open work is no longer possible, but where the visible organization has disappeared the invisible work of the Spirit is not hindered. Here, for example, is a moving message from a student in Latvia where the S.C.M. has been suppressed: 'My task to-day is what Luther called the most difficult of all: prayer and intercession. Yes, it is difficult, because we want to take action ourselves, to *do* good. But I must give over to Him the whole of my youth, in complete confidence, knowing that He will take care of that too—that His Spirit will work unceasingly.' "

[1] Religious Education Press, Manor Road, Wallington, Surrey.

A LETTER FROM HOLLAND

The following letter from Holland to a friend in America reveals something of the trial through which Christians in that country are passing.

"We are all well and try to be patient. We are very thankful for what is being done for our Mission work. It is very painful to be absolutely separated from so much we love and that is part of our life. Some old tidings get through, but we look forward to a better time. We are getting a thorough lesson in Christian forbearance and study the meaning of Matthew v, 44. More than ever we learn to hate lies and falsehood, though at the same time the temptations in their direction are very strong. You will have seen in the papers that a number of our leading men has been imprisoned. This is a cause of anxiety for many. We learn to live from day to day, in all respects. Many rise to the occasion, but for some it is too much. On the whole our people are admirable but I fear the moment may come that fearful things happen. Rumours are many and vary greatly. Praying for our daily bread may become a very real need within a short time. But when I think of the countless multitudes that have always suffered hardships and privation, how then, can we complain? May God have compassion on our poor world. We are determined to endure well whatever God permits, though we are well aware that there is a limit where resistance may be a matter of conscience or of courage."

OUR OXFORD HEADQUARTERS

It is now four months since we were welcomed by our friends in Oxford, and we owe them more than we can say for the countless ways in which they have helped us. It is Manchester College in particular which has made possible our coming here. But for the kindness of the Principal and Council of the College in putting an extremely fine college hall at our disposal, we should have been without the accommodation which makes it possible to carry on our work in Oxford. The hall was opened in 1919 in memory of Mr. James Arlosh, a benefactor of the College. It is a large delightful room in which we are able to provide desks for the whole of our staff, in accordance with up-to-date American practice, down each side of the long hall. The hall has excellent lighting and the unusual advantage of central heating. We are most grateful to our hosts, and our friends all over the world will join in appreciation of their generosity. The Council on the Christian Faith and the Common Life at its meeting a fortnight ago expressed its warm gratitude to Manchester College.

URGENT APPEAL FOR BACK NUMBERS

Can our members help us by providing copies of C.N-L. No. 10 and especially C.N-L. No. 0? Without these we cannot proceed with the rebinding of Volume 1 for which we are receiving many requests.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

"Pater Noster"—We have now sold over 13,700 copies of the reprint in eight-page leaflet form, 7¼ × 3 ins. Single copy 3d.; 6 for 1s. 2d.; 12 for 1s. 11d.; 25 for 3s. 6d.; 50 for 5s.; 100 for 9s.; 250 for 18s. 6d.; 500 for 32s. 6d.; and 1,000 for 57s. 6d. Post free.

Subscriptions—The rate of subscriptions to the News-Letter is 12s. 6d. ($3.0 in U.S.A. and Canada) for one year, and 6s. 6d. ($1.50 in U.S.A. and Canada) for six months, and 3s. 6d. for three months. Single copies—4d. each, 1s. 2d. for 6, 1s. 11d. for 12 copies post free.

All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—

THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER, ARLOSH HALL, MANSFIELD ROAD, OXFORD.

Published by Dr. J. H. Oldham for the Council on the Christian Faith and the Common Life and printed by the Kemp Hall Press, Ltd., in the City of Oxford.